

# Fires and flood discovery

British Red Cross work mapped alongside research from interviews with 50 people who've experienced fires and floods and responders to these emergencies

Prevention

Before emergency

Emergency starts

Hours

Days

Weeks

Months / years

Research / strategy

## Building safety

- It's becoming clear hundreds of buildings are at risk of fire and not just because of cladding
- Some buildings with certain cladding will be condemned if they don't have a fire patrol
- Building controls aren't fit for purpose
- Some people are worried about fires or other emergencies
- Building costs have been put ahead of safety in some places
- Budget cuts can make fire safety harder
- Often no organisation is willing to pay the cost of removing cladding
- Some organisations are taking steps to reduce fires risks
- Some buildings aren't safe for people to evacuate from a fire
- People can live in crowded homes before emergencies

## Campaigning

- ▶ People and community groups need their concerns about the root causes of emergencies taken seriously and acted on
- Some people see local politicians as advocates, others don't
- Some people think councils and other organisations will sort fire risks
- People won't always know their rights for safety and support

## Organisations and relationships

- ▶ Local authorities aren't always able to carry out their duties such as emergency planning, identifying those in need and finding people accommodation
- ▶ Official organisations and community groups can have little or no relationship between them prior to an emergency, making trust, collaboration and coordination harder
  - + *London Tri-borough Community resilience project (funded by Nesta)*
  - + *London Community Engagement project*
  - + *Community Resilience in Scotland project*
- People don't trust all organisations equally
- People are aware of the British Red Cross, but not what it does or how it relates to emergencies

## Preparation and connections

- ▶ More connected communities still experience the main impacts of emergencies on housing, finances and mental health
  - + *Apiring communities – Orkney and Scotland*
  - + *Crisis Education (targetted at identified high risk groups)*
  - + *Community Connectors – tackling loneliness and social isolation)*
- ▶ People with past experience of emergencies don't prepare for next time and are just as impacted in housing, mental health and finances
- People feel there is a limit to how prepared they can be for an emergency
- Some people plan how they'll get out if there is a fire
- People don't take flood alerts and fire alarms seriously
- Some people make small changes to behaviour to reduce fire risks
- People often have fire precautions like fire extinguishers

## Attitudes and behaviours

- Most people don't think emergencies are going to happen to them
- Some people aren't aware their house is at risk of flooding
- Previous experience can make people feel better prepared
- People are surprised by the speed and extent of floods
- People don't know how much damage floods and fires cause until they happen to them

## Stress and abandonment

- Fire risks are causing people chronic stress
- Some people's lives are being put on hold by fire risks
- People feel abandoned by organisations

## Information and guidance

- ▶ People want information which is easy to find or where they are already looking
  - + *'Ready for winter' campaign*
  - + *Google 'What Now' messaging*
  - + *First aid app / campaigns / media / messaging / education*
  - + *Psychosocial Support toolkit*
- ▶ People want clear, trusted, consistent and authoritative information to prepare and react to an emergency
  - + *NIMBUS community resilience toolkit*
  - + *Flood workshop (funded by Aviva) in three areas in 2018*
- People hear important information second hand
- People want to be shown what to do in an emergency, not just told

## Safety and instincts

- People's first priority is theirs and family's safety
- Some people will use instincts to react in emergencies
- People need to get through first few hours – food and shelter
  - + *Pillowcase Project*
  - + *Emergency app*
- Emergency services just deal with immediate needs of safety

## Evacuation

- Sometimes people evacuate too late or not at all from a flood
- People with limited mobility will struggle to evacuate
- Evacuation can be a slow and lonely process
- People often have to evacuate due to side effects of flooding

## Responders

- Official organisations can be slow to react in an emergency
- Community groups can respond faster to support people
- Community groups want information about how to react in an emergency
- ▶ Frontline responders can experience stress, trauma and burnout due to being overworked, under-trained and unsupported
  - + *Psychosocial and mental health team*
  - + *Resilient responder project*
  - + *Training to ILCR staff and community connectors*
  - + *Introduction to Major Emergencies training (deliver to organisations such as Muslim Aid and Islamic Relief)*
- Community groups aren't always able to do long term support like housing and mental health

# Hours

## Knowing who is in need

- ▶ Official organisations don't know who is in need or what their needs are as people are not aware or want to register that they've been affected
- People don't expect support beyond immediate safety
- People don't know what support they're entitled to
  - + *Emergency response teams*
- Some people will go to rest centres
- ▶ People want support from those they can relate to and feel safe with
- It takes time for frontline responders to assess someone's needs
- More vulnerable people might be prioritised for support
- ▶ People want to maintain privacy and dignity whilst getting support but often this doesn't happen

## Food and shelter

- People's first concern is having a place to stay
- Family and friends can provide temporary accommodation
- Some people with insurance will go to a hotel
- People want money for immediate needs
  - + *Cash Assistance programme*
- Few people have basic needs like food and shelter not met

# Days

## Community spirit or lack of it

- ▶ Community groups and businesses want to help people but there can be issues with the timeliness and usefulness of support
  - + *A million hands partnership with Scouts*
  - + *Community Reserve Volunteers*
  - + *Retail shops*
  - + *EmpowHER development opportunities for girls and young women*
- People appreciate ways to lift their spirits and feel that others care
- Evacuated properties can be broken into
- There won't be "community spirit" from everyone
- Some people not affected will try to exploit the situation
- Publicity and public attention can quickly die off
- Some places become less connected

## Displacement

- ▶ People want to return home quickly
- ▶ People can be displaced for months, left isolated and unable to do daily routines
- Private renters can be more vulnerable
- Emergencies are made worse by an already stretched housing market

# Weeks

## Clean up

- People need time off from work to deal with admin, clean up and repairs
- Some people need help replacing possessions
- Cleaning after a flood takes weeks
- People are less precious with possessions following an emergencies

## Repairs and insurance

- ▶ People can experience a lot of stress repairing their home as the process is unfamiliar, uncertain and feels out of their control
- It takes months to repair a house
- ▶ Insurers are the organisation people interact with most after an emergency, impacting their speed and quality of recovery
  - + *Psychosocial training for Aviva staff*
- Insurers make quicker decisions in bigger emergencies
- Lots of houses will be devalued
- Having money makes recovery easier
- In larger emergencies building repairs can go unregulated
- It's not clear what financial grants are available to people
- Having money makes recovery easier

# Months / years

## Distress, trauma and mental health

- ▶ People can need ways to relieve stress and trauma but won't actively seek out support
- People "just get on with it" and put on a brave face
- Some people blame themselves for an emergency happening to their family
- Losing possessions affects people's sense of self and their identity
- Some people's houses will be emotionally tainted
- People have ambient stress about it happening again
- Some people don't want to talk about the emergency
- Very few people will try seek out mental health support
- Even if people do seek mental health support it may not be suitable

## Accountability and engagement

- People want a single point of accountability and blame
- There's a lack of transparency and accountability about donations
- There is often no follow up by official organisations

- ▶ Key finding
- + *work British redcross is already doing to try address this*

*People* - Those affected by or at risk of floods and fires

*Frontline responders* - Anyone who has supported in an emergency including staff, trained volunteers, local groups and spontaneous volunteers

*Emergencies* - Floods and fires

*Official organisations* - statutory agencies and national charities

*Community groups* - (Usually) local groups with a common interest who respond in an emergency including churches, mosques, sports clubs and youth groups

*Connected communities* - many people in a place already know their neighbours before emergencies and when faced with one try help each other